SPORT

Atletico, Villarreal win to keep pressure on La Liga giants

BARCELONA: Antoine Griezmann came off the bench and struck twice for Atletico Madrid to help his side beat Levante 3-1 in La Liga on Saturday.

Villarreal moved provisionally second with a 2-0 win at Espanyol, while Diego Simeone's Atletico are fourth. Levante are 17th win nine points.

Atletico continued their 11 match unbeaten run in La Liga in part thanks to veteran forward Griezmann's second-half impact on a hard-fought triumph.

Adrian de la Fuente's own goal sent the hosts ahead at the Metropolitano but Levante levelled through Manu Sanchez.

All-time Atletico top scorer Griezmann came on after an hour and hit a brace to earn his side all three points.

"It's hard for us to find solutions [in matches] sometimes, but those of us who come on from the bench are always bringing a boost," Griezmann told Movistar.

"Teams that go far in all competitions do that because they have [good depth], and we all have to be ready, those who start and those who are on the bench."

Atletico have taken the lead in every league game they have played this season and went ahead in the 12th minute against Levante.

Pablo Barrios' cross-shot from the right was pushed away by visiting goalkeeper Mathew Ryan but straight into helpless teammate De la Fuente and into the net.

Levante pulled level in the 21st minute as Atletico were caught napping at a corner and Sanchez nodded home at the back post after he was left completely unmarked.

Simeone sent on Atletico talisman Griezmann just after the hour mark and the 34-year-old made an impact 28 seconds later.

Griezmann tapped home from close range after Marcos Llorente cut the ball back for him to give Atletico the lead once more.

It was the fastest goal by a substitute in La Liga in the past decade.

Griezmann grabbed his second with 10 minutes remaining after Ryan denied Julian Alvarez but the loose ball sat up nicely for the French forward to lunge in and turn over the line.

Meanwhile, Villarreal eased to a comfortable victory at Espanyol, with Gerard Moreno and Alberto Moleiro on target for the Yellow Submarine.

Their victory took them within four points of Xabi Alonso's Real Madrid and one point above Barca, but both teams have a game in hand.

Marcelino Garcia Toral's side suffered an embarassing defeat at Cypriot minnows Pafos in the Champions League on Wednesday but responded at the RCDE Stadium.

Veteran forward Moreno curled home from the edge of the box to put the visitors ahead in the 43rd minute against his former club.

Moleiro doubled their advantage early in the second half, following up to score after his first shot was saved by Marko Dmitrovic.—AFP

SAO PAULO: McLaren's Lando Norris of Britain drives during the qualifying session of the Sao Paulo Formula One Grand Prix at the Jose Carlos Pace racetrack on Saturday. Norris continued his dominant run of form by claiming a dramatic late pole. The 25-year-old, who reclaimed leadership of the world championship by winning in Mexico two weeks ago, reacted to late pressure after a messy opening Q3 lap with a stunning last run in the final seconds. He clocked one minute and 9.511 seconds to outpace nearest rival Italian teenage rookie Kimi Antonelli of Mercedes by 0.174 seconds after Red Bull's four-time champion Max Verstappen was eliminated in the first qualifying session and Lewis Hamilton of Ferrari in Q2. They qualified 16th and 13th, respectively while McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri, who is nine points behind in the title race, was fourth behind Ferrari's Charles Leclerc in windy conditions.—AFP

Bayern's winning run ends with draw at Union

BERLIN: Harry Kane headed in a stoppage-time equaliser to avoid Bayern Munich's first defeat of the season but a 2-2 draw at Union Berlin ended their record winning start across all competitions.

Union thought they had bagged their first ever win over Bayern with Danilho Doekhi's second goal in the 83rd minute but Kane headed in the leveller. Bayern top the Bundesliga on 28 points, six ahead of RB Leipzig, who lost 3-1 at Hoffenheim. Borussia Dortmund are third on 21.

Bayern, who had made it 16 victories from 16 games with a 2-1 win against Champions League holders Paris St-Germain on Tuesday — a record for Europe's top five leagues — looked to have run out of steam against the hard-working Berliners.

The result left them one win short of their own league record of 10 straight victories at the start of the 2015/16 season.

"It was a tough game. It wasn't our best game, but we stayed focused and managed to equalise," Kane said. "That's football, there are games like today where things go against you. We'll take the point.

"It would've been worse to go into the international break with a defeat. We can keep the momentum going with this draw. 16 wins in a row is incredible but now that it is over, it won't be the main talking point anymore. We move on," said the forward.

The hosts thought they had taken the lead through Ilyas Ansah's ninth-minute header but the fans were bitterly disappointed after the referee ruled it marginally offside following a VAR review.

BERLIN: Bayern Munich's Harry Kane (R) heads to score against Union Berlin during their Bundesliga match at Stadion An der Alten Forsterei.—Reuters

They still had the upper hand and earned a deserved lead in the 27th when Bayern keeper Manuel Neuer let Doekhi's weak shot slip through his hands and under his body. It was the first time Bayern had conceded a first-half goal in the Bundesliga this season and the first time they had trailed.

Luis Diaz drew them level after playing a superb one-two with Josip Stanisic, sliding to keep the ball in play and curling a shot from near the sideline into the far top corner.

The Colombian should have scored again for the champions in the 45th after he was sent through by Kane but he missed the target with only the keeper to beat.

It was the hosts who scored again in the 83rd when Dutchman Doekhi volleyed in after Kane failed to clear a free kick. The England captain, however, made amends with his 13th league goal of the season to rescue a point for the visitors.

Elsewhere on Saturday, Dortmund were held to a 1-1 draw at Hamburg, with the hosts scoring an equaliser through Ransford-Yeboah Koenigsdoerffer in the seventh minute of added time.

Outclassed 4-1 by Manchester City in the Champions League midweek, Dortmund were solid but unspectacular in a game with few chances, with English midfielder Carney Chukwuemeka scoring in the second half.

Koenigsdoerffer denied Dortmund victory at the death as he headed in a cross to prevent Niko Kovac's side from climbing to second and closing the gap on leaders Bayern.

Leipzig also stumbled, dropping points for just the third time this season in a loss at Hoffenheim.

Teenage forward Yan Diomande put Leipzig in front nine minutes in, scoring for the third straight game.

Hoffenheim hit back on 20 minutes with Albian Hajdari tapping in. The hosts took the lead just before half-time when Tim Lemperle headed in their second.

Leipzig's hopes of a late equaliser were quashed when Grischa Proemel scored with 11 minutes remaining.

Meanwhile, Bayer Leverkusen romped to their biggest win of the season with a 6-0 thrashing of Heidenheim at home to climb to fourth.

Patrik Schick and Ibrahim Maza scored twice while Jonas Hofmann and Ernest Poku also grabbed goals.

In Saturday's late game, Borussia Moenchengladbach beat derby rivals Cologne 3-1 to lift themselves out of the bottom three.

Gladbach won thanks to goals from Philipp Sander, Kevin Diks and Haris Tabakovic, with Cologne's Luca Waldschmidt scoring a late penalty.—Agencies

Marseille defeat Brest as Lens thrash Monaco in Ligue 1

PARIS: English duo Angel Gomes and Mason Greenwood scored as Olympique de Marseille took over top spot provisionally in Ligue 1 from Paris St-Germain on Saturday with a 3-0 home win over Brest.

Gomes fired Marseille ahead in the 25th minute with a free-kick that squirmed through the hands of Brest goalkeeper Radoslaw Majecki.

Greenwood struck his eighth league goal of the season, from the penalty spot after Igor Paixao was fouled by defender Kenny Lala.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang bagged a late third as Marseille shook off their controversial midweek Champions League defeat by Atalanta to go a point clear of PSG in the French top flight.

"It's typical of Marseille. We played badly against Atalanta on Wednesday with almost the same team as today," said Marseille coach Roberto De Zerbi.

"But today I think we played a very good match and I had a lot of fun on the bench. There's no reason right now for a Marseille player to be worried. We're top of the table with the best attack and 28 goals scored. I'd even like them to play with more courage and confidence," De Zerbi added.

RC Lens are level with Marseille after a 4-1 win over 10-man AS Monaco, who had Folarin Balogun sent off shortly after he had scored.

Odsonne Edouard put Lens ahead in the principality but Balogun equalised with a penalty. Wesley Said restored the lead for Lens before Balogun saw red for a challenge on Mamadou Sangare.

Sangare promptly grabbed Lens' third on the stroke of half-time. Said scored again in the 60th minute. Ansu Fati missed a late penalty for Monaco to compound their misery as they slid to a second straight league defeat, falling five points behind the leading duo.

Elsewhere, Le Havre snatched a last-gasp equaliser to draw 1-1 with Nantes.—AFP

Milan let two-goal lead slip in draw at Parma

PARMA: AC Milan squandered a two-goal lead as struggling Parma mounted a spirited comeback to salvage a 2-2 draw on Saturday, with Enrico Delprato's second-half strike denying the visitors top spot in Serie A.

Milan sit second level on 22 points with while Parma are 17th with eight points, two points above the relegation zone.

Milan took the lead after 12 minutes when Alexis Saelemaekers drilled a low shot into the far corner, with Parma goalkeeper Zion Suzuki getting his fingertips to the ball but reacting too late to keep it out.

The visitors doubled their lead in the 25th minute after Saelemaekers, who had been causing constant problems down the flank, was brought down in the box by Abdoulaye Ndiaye after drifting towards the byline.

Following a brief VAR check, the penalty was confirmed, and Rafael Leao made no mistake from the spot, firing a precise shot into the right corner.

Parma pulled one back just before halftime when Adrian Bernabe curled a superb strike into the top corner and drew level shortly after the hour as Delprato met Sascha Britschgi's cross from the right with a close-range header at the near post.

Both teams had chances to snatch victory late on, with goalkeeper Mike Maignan keeping Milan on level terms with a sharp save to keep out Delpratos near-post header before Saelemaekers rounded Suzuki but fired wide of an open goal.

Luka Modric tried his luck from the edge of the box in stoppage time with a curling left-foot effort that Suzuki spilled before gathering at the second attempt.

"We needed to battle more but we were too passive," said Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri. "You cannot just let them shoot like we did right at the end of the first half when the match looked done, because you make it easier to be caught.

"Then we came out for the second half all over the place and we only woke up once they made it 2-2."

Three points behind Milan are Juventus, who were held to a goalless draw by local rivals Torino on a day which had featured no goals until Saelemaekers opened the scoring in Parma.

Juve sit fifth on 19 points after a scrappy but engaging derby at their Allianz Stadium in which both teams had chances to win.

Che Adams was denied in the 63rd minute when the Scotland forward charged forward and unleashed a low drive which was brilliantly kept out by Juve goalkeeper Michele Di Gregorio.

And moments later Di Gregorio's Torino counterpart Alberto Paleari pulled off an even more impressive stop to claw away Weston McKennie's close-range header.

"We were missing that little bit of quality and the fantasy that's needed in games like this," Juve coach Luciano Spalletti told reporters. "You need that precision to pass the ball between two opponents. You also need a little bit of luck."

Elsewhere, Como and Cagliari played out a goalless stalemate while Hellas Verona were also held to a 0-0 draw at Lecce.—Agencies

Asif battles through, Hasnain bounces back at worlds

DOHA: Defending champion Mohammad Asif survived a tough challenge while teen compatriot Mohammad Hasnain Akhtar rebounded with a victory on the second day of the IBSF World Snooker Championship on Sunday.

The 43-year-old Asif was pushed hard by Bahrain's Habib Subah before securing a 4-2 win in his second group stage match.

Asif opened with a 50 break to take the first frame 70-28, but Subah levelled by claiming the second 77-50. The Bahraini then edged a tight third frame 74-56, which featured a 56 break from Asif.

The Pakistani veteran responded by winning the next three frames. He compiled another 50 break in a 65-21 fourth-frame win, took the fifth 69-29 and sealed the match 64-51 in the sixth, a frame in which Subah made a 50 break.

In other action, the 16-year-old Hasnain recovered from his opening-day loss to defeat Egypt's Hesham Shawky 4-1. After dropping the first frame 79-1, the Under-17 champion Hasnain won four consecutively, 83-24, 64-46, 75-42 (featuring a 50 break) and 53-29.

Elsewhere, Pakistan's Asjad Iqbal beat China's Cao Zeyi 4-1. After losing the first frame 57-4, Asjad won a close second frame 57-51 before dominating the next three 65-5, 70-21 and 68-35.

However, Poland's Michał Szubarczyk defeated national champion Shahid Aftab 4-2 (68-21, 35-73(50), 46-69, 58-23, 86-21, 62-42).—Agencies

Mikaeel wins another title

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Mikaeel Ali Baig overpowered compatriot Hamza Roman to win the boys' singles final of the ITF Pakistan National Foods World Junior Tennis Championship J-60 here at the PTF-SDA Tennis Complex on Sunday.

Youngster Mikaeel defeated Hamza 6-4, 6-4 to clinch the decider which was the in-form player's third consecutive title in international competitions during the past three weeks.

In the boys' doubles final, Hamza and compatriot Abubakr Talha defeated the pair of Mikaeel and Lithuania's Kristijonas Milasauskas 6-4, 6-4.—Sports Reporter

Red-hot Rybakina scorches Sabalenka for maiden WTA Finals crown

RIYADH: Elena Rybakina capped a flawless week at the WTA Finals by stunning world number one Aryna Sabalenka 6-3, 7-6(7/0) in the final on Saturday for her first trophy in the season-ending championships and a record $5.235 million in prize money.

The last stop of this season's WTA Tour kicked off with four different Grand Slam champions in the field, but ultimately went to a player who did not even reach the quarter-finals of a major in 2025 and was the last to qualify with a win in Ningbo and a run to the Tokyo semi-finals.

Rybakina earned 1,500 points — her biggest haul — after she was denied any for her 2022 Wimbledon win when the ATP and WTA penalised the major for banning Russian and Belarusian players from playing in the wake of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

"It's been an incredible week, I honestly didn't expect any result and to go so far, I mean, it's just incredible," Rybakina said after collecting the Billie Jean King trophy, her third title of the season.

"Congratulations Aryna for being number one [at the year-end] for the second season in a row, an amazing achievement.

"Today was such a tough battle, some moments I didn't like here but it's tennis and I hope we're going to play many more finals in big tournaments together."

In a rematch of the 2023 Australian Open title clash won by Sabalenka, it was Rybakina who made early inroads with a barrage of powerful winners to shrug off concerns over a sore shoulder and break for a 4-2 lead in the opening set.

The ice-cool world number six rallied from 15-40 down in the seventh game to tighten her hold and secure the set with more bold ball striking from both flanks, leaving 2022 finalist Sabalenka with a mountain to climb.

Rybakina ramped up the pressure in the next set as she lost only two points in four service games. She showed her battling qualities for a clutch hold in the 10th game when Sabalenka crashed a forehand into the net.

Rybakina cranked up her massive serve two games later and forced a tiebreak, where the Kazakh grabbed the early lead and never looked back to secure her 11th straight match victory and with it the title.

KAZAKHSTAN'S Elena Rybakina lifts the WTA Finals trophy after defeating Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus in the decider at the King Saud University Indoor Arena.—AFP

"It wasn't my best performance, but yeah, Elena you were definitely the better player," Sabalenka said.

"You literally smashed me out of the court, so very well done. I'm happy to see you play your best tennis. It was a nice comeback at the end of this season.

"Now it's time to enjoy your off-season and enjoy this beautiful trophy," Sabalenka added, before fighting off tears as she thanked her own team.

"Not the result we all wanted today ... I guess I'm getting old, I'm getting sensitive. So many things to be proud of."—Reuters